L E T T E R

TO THE STUDENTS IN DIVINITY

IN THE DIOCESE OF CHESTER;

occasioned by a late publication of

" A LIST OF BOOKS," WITH " A PREFACE,"

BY THE BISHOP OF CHESTER:

AND INTENDED AS

A SUPPLEMENT TO THAT WORK.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD, AND SOLD BY THE BOOKSELLERS IN OXFORD, CHESTER, AND MANCHESTER.

M DCC XCII.

[PRICE SIXPENCE.]

Harvard College Library Coolidge Fund October 25, 1939

LETTER

TO THE STUDENTS IN DIVINITY

IN THE DIOCESE OF CHESTER.

GENTLEMEN,

With fo partial and at the fame time fo crude "a lift of books intended for the use of the younger clergy, and other students in divinity," that I blush for the imposition designed against your reasoning faculty, and against that liberty, wherewith Christ hath made you free. I feel for that oftentatious parade and vanity which are displayed in compounding and administering an opiate, that is calculated to cloud your understanding, and lay the rising vigour of ingenuous minds into an ignoble and dangerous rest. The candor and modesty of the bishop, wherever it can be discovered, ought neither to be repressed nor concealed: he confesses that he would be understood to recommend a part of so great a variety of books "rather from a general examination than an accurate study of them."

His lordship's preface deserves your attention, and we will, with your leave, go over it together. We will not stay to inquire into the extent of "his own personal knowlege

^{*} Preface to " Lift of Books," p. 7.

knowledge and reading," tho' we may observe, by the way, that his "reading" is not inconsiderable, if he hath read half the books he recommends to you; and even admitting that to be the case, his "knowledge" appears to be such, as to admit of considerable allowance for the little improvement he hath made, or leaves us to presume that he benefitted by the advice of Solomon-he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow. (Eccles. i. 18.)

It feems not to have been the intention of our right reverend father to instruct the student until after he had entered on his noviciate, His "list was intended for their "use chiefly, who, upon conviction already formed, (which by the way, implies such a knowledge of the subject, as renders all further instruction from his lordship needless,) "have engaged, or are desirous to engage themselves, to preach the faith and discipline of the church of England against all opposers."—Thus the bishop renounces the character of the recruiting officer, who beats up for volunteers, or occasionally overreaches an honest rustic; but confines himself to the duties of adjutant of the regiment, and by proper discipline hopes to prevent desertion.

In the estimation of the bishop it is a great recommendation of his list, that there are few, if any places, in which "the shops will not afford some of the books ranged under each head," (p. 3.)—And he afterwards says, "It has like-"wise been his wish, if it may be, to rescue from neglect fome books of prime merit in point of argument and erudition; a neglect, to which the cheapness of them now in no small degree contributes." (p.4.)—This recommendation of our respective lists, and this design in the publication of them, we enjoy in common. Through the sussing systems of some of his lordship's brethren, in which, by the bye, they are wifer in their generation, than others who provoke or resist

refift discussion, the new Testament itself is a book neglected, as being unfriendly to system-mongers, although it be confessedly the only guide, which an honest man, who is seriously desirous of finding his way, would consult and follow.

The bishop, with more of the wisdom of the serpent than the innocency of the dove, made it (as he avows) " his or principal object to felect fuch books only as were most " obviously employed in maintaining the fundamental doc-" trines of our faith, and in vindicating and illustrating the articles, rites, and ceremonies of the church of England, " avoiding carefully fuch as avowedly controverted those doctrines, rites, and ceremonies, or indirectly opposed them." (p. 4.)—A more impartial adviser would have recommended it to you to have inquired and examined before you determined; instead of taking advantage of an early and premature determination, and leaving you to make your inquiry and examination afterwards. his lordship's proceedings in theology would be reprobated by the practitioners of law in Westminster Hall, for this were to hear the defendant's answer to the charge of the plaintiff, before the plaintiff has been heard for himfelf.

From an apprehension that we should mistake his design, his lordship again repeats it that "his design was not to "produce, or procure a profession of faith; but to put into "the hands of those, who have already formed their judge-"ment, such authors as would best enable them so to explain and desend the reasonableness and certainty of that profession, as becomes those, who undertake to be teachers in religion." (p. 6 and 7.) The good design of your diocesan goes upon the presumption that he is perfectly indifferent how you come by "your profession of faith," provided you will give him leave to "enable you to explain the reasonableness and certainty of it." This looks as if more was meant than met the eye; and induces a strong

a strong suspicion that the bishop was not without hope of inculcating a little of that holy crast which was used by Demetrius and his workmen, in order to monopolize the making of silver shrines for Diana.

We must not forget that the bishop is head of a college in one of our univerlities, tho' the recollection of that circumstance will not add to his character for knowledge or veracity. Confidering, therefore, that he fuffains this public appointment, (and it has been faid not without honor to himself) we may be allowed to express the more aftonishment how he could gravely fay, that " they, who " have been educated in an university, have neither wanted " the means of information, nor the affiffance requifite, to " acquire a conviction in the faith and discipline of the " church of England." (p. 5.) There are many persons now living, who have been members of both our universities, and who, at this inflant, are " of found memory and understanding," and of unimpeached integrity, who do not remember to have received there any theological instruction whatever.

The bishop very prudently delights to deal in generals,—he speaks of finding "nothing in our articles and liturgy contradictory to the "the general tenor of the scriptures." (p. 5). Without taking upon me to impugn any of these articles, as blasphemy, or as nonsense, he (I may venture to assirm,) would be thought a bold man who should say that the many thousand distinct propositions they contain are, all and every of them, agreeable to the word of God,—if he were not supported by numbers, and those numbers supported by the civil power. Volunteers who enter into the service of the church from conviction are sew;—habits of association,—the countenance of names,—the influence of prejudice, and sometimes the bribe of emolument, operate upon the young academic,—as a press warrant on a seafaring

man,---and as the one is hurried on board a tender, so the other is driven into the church.

Lest the bishop should have a want of liberality imputed to him, he has made a formal declaration that he "does "not wish to preclude any one from the means of reading "the objections of socinians or insidels against our faith:" (p. 8.) but he has professedly omitted to mention in his list every name and work that may have an unfavourable aspect towards the doctrines of the articles and liturgy. This omission has occasioned these supplemental pages to his list from an inferior hand, for he has been so very reserved in telling his students where they may find books which will give them information, that one may suppose it requires more than ordinary discernment to discover them.

All objections to the liturgy are placed to the account either of "an ignorance of its history, and want of "knowledge in the sentiments and language of contemtion porary writers, or of an eager desire of the popularity

" to

^{*} He mentions indeed (p. 51.) the Racovian catechism, the Fratres Poloni, and Piercii vindiciæ fratrum dissentientium in Anglia; but those he is assured are publications fufficiently remote from the ordinary course of reading, Why he has not mentioned the works of Priestley and Lindsey on the one hand, or (if dead authors please him better,) the incomparable treatife of Hopton Haynes lately reprinted, together with the publications of Cardale, and on the other, " Diffent from the church of England fully justified," by Towgood, whose name he is not afraid to produce (p. 40) when he finds him defending infant baptifm as a reasonable service? But what can we say, when we find the bishop (p. 12.) objecting to Mosheim and his translator as adverse to the church of England? Why, that the truth of history, as well as of the scripture, must be facrificed to that faid church. His lordship's choosing to trust his young student with Dupin a professed papist, rather than with Mosheim and Maclaine, is sufficiently curious, but perfectly confonant to church-of-England - orthodoxy,

of to be obtained from the interested liberality of our " public prints." (p. 8) Wifer and more learned fathers of our church have acknowledged the justice of many of those objections which the bishop here contemptuously calls " crude cavils." There are those who know much more of the "history of the liturgy, and the sentiments " and language of contemporary writers," than has fallen to the share of William lord bishop of Chester, who differ very widely from him upon all these matters: but it requires neither the learning of his lordship, nor of those who differ from him, to discover that the knowledge of the "hiftory of the liturgy, and of the fentiments and language of contemporary writers," have nothing to do with the inexpediency, the impolicy, the impiety of retaining a liturgy, which even the narrow mind of James the first could discover to be " an ill-said mass, wanting only the liftings."

Who, among the untold number charged with confipring to "darken the fun by the multitude of arrows "aimed at our religion and establishment," has done more, in proportion to the quantity of his theological writings, to eclipse the light of heaven than this same bishop, in his "two sermons on the sacrament of the Lord's Supper," and in a third, which is, in connection with the former, entitled, "Pardon and sanctification proved to be "privileges annexed to the due use of the Lord's supper, "as a feast on a sacrifice;" and which, but for the setter" addressed to him on that occasion would have remained without expiation, as they would probably have been without notice, to this day?

It is pleasant to observe the bishop repeating the old cant of seeing "those who cat our bread and walk with us in the house

^{*} See "A Letter to the Rt. Rev. Dr. Wm. Cleaver, lord bishop of Chester, upon the subject of his two termons," published by Johnson, 1790.

" house of God as friends, distinguished in the lines of the " enemy." (p. 8.) This observation always appears in a questionable shape. It is intended to bear down, those who consult the truth and interest of the christian faith, before the interest and emolument of an establishment. But the bishop forgets that in his facrificing christianity to churchism, he is most eminently one of those " who while they eat our bread and walk with us in the house of God as friends, are diffinguishable in the lines of the enemy." And the example of prevarication is most striking in one who leaves defenceless, the genuine gospel of Christ, for the beggarly elements of an human eftablishment after the folemn declaration at his ordination that he is " deter-" mined, out of the scriptures, to instruct the people com-" mitted to his charge, and to teach nothing, as required of " necessity to eternal falvation, but that which he shall be " perfuaded may be concluded and proved by the scripture." Admitting, my lord, that "the early fathers, if carefully examined, are the best witnesses of the doctrines, which " obtained in the primitive ages of christianity;" (p. 13.) it is not within the reach of ordinary students to procure their works, nor the fashion of the times to read them. For the value of their general evidence read Daille ;-- and for the early opinions concerning Jesus Christ read Dr. Priestley's elaborate and faithful report of their testimony.

Before I conclude, give me leave, gentlemen, to recommend to your perusal "the catalogue of books in divinity" published by the truly learned bishop Watson as an Appendix to his "collection of theological tracts;" and if you will do him the further justice to read his very excellent preface to those volumes, you will be very competent to measure the learning, the judgment, the liberality of your present diocesan, and to determine how far he is disposed to suffer you to do justice to yourselves.

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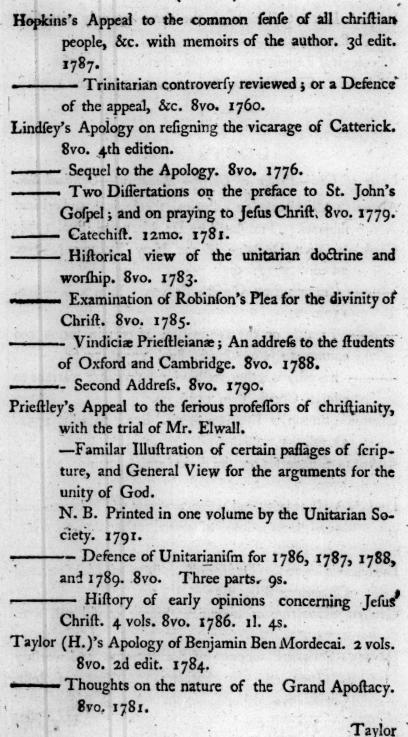
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